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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000588

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MARR](#) [IZ](#) [LO](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES IRAQ WITH NEW SLOVAK DEFENSE
MINISTER KASICKY

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe Vallee as per E.O. 12958 1.4 (b) and
(d)

11. (C) Summary. The Ambassador met with Slovakia's new Minister of Defense Frantisek Kasicky on July 17. Kasicky said it is important for the new government to keep its promise to voters to withdraw troops from Iraq, but that the withdrawal process would be slow and deliberate. No final plan will be announced when the new government releases its program in the upcoming weeks. Kasicky is concerned about remaining a "trusted partner" of the U.S. He wants to keep tight control of the message given to the media about a withdrawal, which he promised would be undertaken in coordination with the handover of power and responsibility to Iraq's people. End summary.

KASICKY'S PRIORITIES

12. (SBU) Kasicky enumerated his priorities for MoD as follows:

- To work more closely with the Slovak President in his capacity as Commander of the Armed Forces;
- To stabilize the personnel in the armed forces by providing better economic and social benefits, including to retirees and veterans;
- To continue to reform the armed forces so they are better able to perform the tasks assigned to them;
- To strengthen the capacity of the armed forces to respond to non-military threats; (Comment. We understood this to mean natural disasters such as floods or fires. End comment.)
- To conduct an audit of the MoD to be sure financial assets are best used to meet the armaments and training needs of the armed forces;
- To coordinate the activities of all Slovakia's security and defensive bodies;
- To support the Slovak arms industry. Kasicky gave three reasons such support is important: a) to aid in modernization of Slovak forces; b) to create employment opportunities in the industry; and c) to promote Slovak arms on the world market.

IRAQ

13. (C) With respect to Slovakia's involvement in Iraq, Kasicky described the pre-election promise to pull out of Iraq as "a fact" and a promise that needs to be kept. That said, Kasicky also put forward the following assertions:

- It is important to continue supporting the Iraqi government.
- The Slovak government will consult and coordinate all of their steps with all of the concerned parties.
- Kasicky has ordered plans and calculations relating to a withdrawal, and alternative ideas that would enable Slovakia to continue supporting Iraq. The goal of the MoD is to fulfill its promise while still remaining a "trusted partner" of the U.S.

¶4. (C) Kasicky said "When we talk about withdrawal we are not talking about a process of days. It will be gradual, purposeful, and coordinated with all the many concerned - not only with you but also with the Iraqi government. The withdrawal will be coordinated with the handover of power and responsibility to Iraq,s people." (Comment. Kasicky was very careful when making this statement and he corrected his translator twice. End comment.)

¶5. (C) Kasicky said that Slovakia would continue to support Iraq with training, material aid, and other forms of support to be coordinated with U.S.

¶6. (SBU) The Ambassador asked if the government program to be released in the coming weeks will be so detailed as to preclude further consultations on a range of options for Slovak forces in Iraq. Kasicky said that the issue of Slovak forces in Iraq would only be provisionally resolved in the government program. (Comment. Kasicky told his translator to repeat the word "provisionally" End comment.) He said there have not yet been any coalition discussions on this issue. The government program will discuss but not resolve the question of forces in Iraq. Time will be left to discuss other issues.

¶7. (C) Kasicky said "This will solve the situation in such a way as to provide help to the Iraqi people and maintain our partnership with you." "We will not threaten the fulfillment of the tasks now assigned to our troops under difficult circumstances."

¶8. (C) The Ambassador asked if the governments plans would be consistent with a calendar that foresees the handover of MND-CS territory to Iraqi control in January 2007, continued training through March 2007, and the exit of foreign troops

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in late summer 2007. Kasicky responded that "These schedules have been taken into account in our discussions and calculations."

¶9. (C) The Ambassador noted that many countries have provided training for Iraqi,s outside of Iraq, but that we have heard from the Iraqis that they really need help at home. The Ambassador expressed his hope that Slovakia will give weight to the idea of maintaining a presence in Iraq. Kasicky responded that: "That is why we have accounted for a horizon of time as we prepare for withdrawing our troops."

¶10. (C) Kasicky closed by saying that it will be very important for the new government to speak to the public in a detailed and thoughtful way about Iraq, and that the collaboration of the U.S. Embassy will be useful. Kasicky said he expects his Defense Information School training to serve him well in this respect. Kasicky said specifically that the government will not go any further with details of their plans for Iraq when talking to the media without first consulting with the U.S. Kasicky said he does not want the withdrawal from Iraq to be connected in anyone's mind with anti-Americanism. Kasicky acknowledged that we may have felt anti-Americanism in the pre-election campaign. Kasicky said that his position as Minister of Defense is clear, that he was glad to have met the U.S. Ambassador first, and he looks forward to talking openly in the future.

¶11. (C) Comment. Kasicky's past position as Spokesman for the Ministry of Defense came out clearly in this meeting. Although he stated a desire to speak openly, he was notably guarded in his statements and he never strayed from his message. Kasicky's smiles, however, left the listener with an impression that he personally favors maintaining a Slovak military presence for as long as possible, and that Slovakia's "gradual and purposeful" withdrawal will far more resemble the Polish model than the Spanish one. End comment.
VALLEE